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AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

Mentors need to be carefully selected to assist new teachers in making a successful transition from student teaching to being fully licensed and certified to teach in the regular classroom. During the school year, the mentor may help the new teacher in a variety of ways--one is to build confidence in the new teacher for teaching and another is to aid in improving reading instruction. Presently, there is much pressure placed upon teachers to produce high test scores, especially in reading. Issues of how reading should be taught--phonics or whole language--are paramount, and the mentor can assist the beginning teacher to examine and understand the beliefs behind each of the different plans of teaching reading. Mentors need to have many qualities to guide new teachers to achieve as much as possible and then for the teacher to assist students to learn optimally in reading. The new teacher, in turn, can take advantage of many ways to discuss with the mentor how to achieve educational objectives, both short range and long range. There are selected word recognition techniques which might well benefit the new teacher in assisting students in reading achievement, such as phonics, syllabification, or using context clues only. The mentor teacher needs to be highly knowledgeable about the reading curriculum and possess strategies of instruction to guide students to become the best they can be in reading. (NKA)

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Mentoring and the Reading Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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MENTORING AND THE READING CURRICULUM

Mentors can be a very important ingredient to add in improving reading instruction. Mentors need to be carefully selected to assist new teachers in making a successful transition from student teaching to being fully licensed and certified to teach in the regular classroom. During the school year, the mentor may help the new teacher in a variety of ways. One is to build confidence in the new teacher for teaching. There are new teachers who enter regular teaching with "fear and trembling." Being successful in teaching is vital for all teachers (Ediger, 1995, 1- 7). How might a mentor assist teachers to achieve, grow, and develop?

Reading Instruction as the First R

The three r's of reading, writing, and arithmetic have a long standing history of being highly important in the curriculum. Presently, there is much pressure placed upon teachers to produce high test scores within learners, especially in the area of reading. There are a plethora of slogans pertaining to reading achievement of students such as

1. All students should be able to read on the third grade level by the end of grade three. The question here is which measurement instrument and at what complexity level of test items will be used to measure the grade three reading achievement ideal.
2. Accountability is needed on the teacher's part to produce readers who can read and are not to be labeled as being illiterate. The teacher is to be held accountable for students reading at a proficient level. The query that needs to be made here pertains to who are to be defined as being illiterate and are there adequate materials of instruction, for the teacher to use, to guide optimal learner achievement in reading.
3. Punishments need to be meted out for those teachers/schools who are not being accountable for adequate student achievement in reading. There needs to be school bankruptcy laws, pay for performance, merit pay, school vouchers, charter schools, and performance contracting with business firms to motivate teachers to achieve in helping students in reading achievement (Ediger, 1996, 45- 48).

Mentors should assist beginning teachers to be knowledgeable about the effect of slogans on the teaching of reading.

Slogans, too frequently, provide a basis for the teacher to find methods and approaches in reading instruction which will help students learn to read well, regardless of the socio-economic levels and immediate environments grown up in. There are to be no excuses here, selected educators and business leaders have indicated frequently.

How should reading then be taught? An issue which immediately arises is phonics instruction versus the whole language approach in the teaching of reading. Phonics instruction may be divided into systematic phonics with its very own scope and sequence versus phonics taught as needed to individual students in context.

Whole language approaches which mentors should be well versed in should be the following:

1. individualized reading whereby the student chooses sequential library books to read, from diverse genres and reading levels. Conferences with the teacher are to be held after the completion of reading each library book to analyze student oral reading fluency and comprehension of ideas gleaned from reading.
2. the Big Book procedure in which all students in a group read together with the teacher from the large illustrated book located where all involved can see its contents clearly. Rereading may be done as often as needed. Little/no emphasis is placed on phonics or word analysis in reading.
3. programmed reading in textbook form or from computerized tutorial learning. These are highly formal and emphasize no student or teacher input into programmed reading. Stimulus/response (SR) theory of learning is being stressed since the reader reads a very short segment for comprehension or word analysis, answers a multiple choice test item covering what has been read, and then checks his/her response with that provided by the programmer. Read, respond, and check is stressed continuously in programmed learning. The programs may be considered as being teacher proof since the role of the teacher is largely/only to monitor student on task achievement.
4. basal reader approaches in which the teacher has the attached Manual to use as a guide in selecting objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment techniques in the reading curriculum. The teacher selects from the Manual, but may also freely bring in his/her own ideas in reading instruction in providing for individual differences among learners in the classroom.
5. packaged materials of reading instruction whereby the

contents therein contain everything needed to teach students in reading, such as the Science Research Associates (SRA) Reading Laboratory. Each student may move forward as rapidly as possible in completing and self checking his/her work in sequential lessons. The teacher is the supervisor and aid to students in the reading curriculum to notice that students are on task (Ediger, 1998, 80- 89).

The mentor must assist the beginning teacher to examine and understand the beliefs back of each of the above named plans of teaching reading, among others. The psychology and philosophy of each differs from the others. Attaching meaning to what to stress in reading instruction is vital. The mentor then must help new teachers to implement that which is beneficial to each student in reading. Learners individually need to achieve as much as possible in the reading curriculum. The new teacher should not get bogged down on that it is either phonics or the whole language approach in teaching reading, but rather an eclectic procedure needs to be taken so that each student may achieve optimally.

Mentors need to have selected qualities in order to guide new teachers to achieve as much as possible and then for the latter to assist students to learn optimally in reading. Individually, students should learn as much as possible. Which traits should teachers possess in working with beginning teachers?

1. the mentor needs to be a friendly person who is able to work successfully with others. Hardly can a rude, haughty, aloof, mistrustful individual work well with beginning teachers.
2. the mentor needs to be able to work effectively with the individual teacher being mentored. A mentor may be graceful and charismatic with some, but not with all new teachers. The mentor then needs to be one who can work well one on one with a new teacher.
3. the mentor needs to be highly knowledgeable about the pros and cons of different plans of teaching reading. He/she needs to be able to discuss each intelligently with the new teacher. There might well be facets of each plan which may be used in planning lessons of instruction. No teacher should be locked dogmatically into the "either or" approach in reading instruction, such as either whole language or phonics procedures. An open minded mentor should assist the new teacher into looking as objectively as possible into each plan of instruction.
4. a mentor needs to work with new teachers in a

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confidential manner. The mentor can be trusted to hold sacred, information pertaining to teaching plans discussed and observations made of the new teacher's teaching. The latter then may freely discuss and evaluate teaching ideas with the mentor.

5. the mentor is interested in working toward an improved reading curriculum. He/she views things as they are and has perspectives pertaining to a more ideal situation in reading instruction. The mentor then works patiently with the new teacher in moving from the actual to the increasingly ideal in reading instruction.

6. the mentor encourages the new teacher to identify problems, gather information, and solve problems pertaining to the teaching of reading.

7. the mentor helps the teacher to establish clear and distinct objectives of instruction.

8. the mentor assists the new teacher to think of varied learning opportunities in reading so that students individually might attain worthwhile goals in reading instruction.

9. the mentor needs to guide the new teacher to emphasize balance among understandings, skills, and attitudinal objectives in reading instruction.

10. the mentor needs to assist the new teacher to perceive balance between whole language and phonics procedures in the teaching of reading (See Manalac, 1995).

There are a plethora of ways available for the new teacher to achieve the above named objectives. These include

1. discussing with the mentor teacher and other teachers problems pertaining to the teaching of reading.

2. reading professional literature pertaining to the specify topic being pursued to achieve one or more of the above named objectives.

3. placing on the agenda of a faculty meeting an item of personal importance in reading instruction.

4. attending a workshop where problems of one's own interest may be discussed in reading instruction.

5. developing a reading club for mentors and new reading teachers whereby problematic situations in reading instruction may be discussed.

6. working on a problem in the teaching of reading which involves an independent study.

7. taking a university course which involves the general area of reading instruction or a special course such as using technology to improve the reading curriculum.

8. writing up a case study of a learner in the classroom who

has specific problems in learning and achieving in reading instruction.

9. diagnosing and remediating a reading problem with mentor guidance.

10. arranging visitations to observe quality reading instruction in other classrooms (Ediger, 1995, 192-195.

The above named activities to achieve established objectives take time and effort for their usefulness to result. These are short as well as long range objectives to achieve and learning activities to do in order that a truly professional reading teacher is in the offing.

Word Recognition and the Mentor

There are selected word recognition techniques which might well benefit the new teacher in assisting students in reading achievement. Analyzing of a word is then in evidence. Phonics, as one approach, stresses students dividing a word into grapheme/phoneme relationships so that symbol/sound correspondence may be used to unlock the identification of an unknown word. Systematic phonics may be emphasized in which grapheme/phoneme relationships are taught as having their very own scope and sequence. The author rather recommends using phonics as needed by the individual learner. Thus if a student, for example, is not able to identify a word in context, he/she may be assisted with sounding out a letter such as an initial consonant to assist in recognizing that word . The initial consonant sound plus the rest of the words in the sentence should provide help in word identification. If that is not adequate, additional help may be given with one or more symbols and their related sounds. The new teacher and mentor need to discuss how much stress should be placed upon phonics in content and elaborate on a specific situation occurring in the classroom. The mentor should be able to provide quality assistance here so that each student might become an independent reader (Ediger, 1996, 85- 92).

A further skill in word analysis involves the use of syllabication. Thus, a student who cannot identify an unknown word may notice a meaningful part which, when separated from the rest of the word, makes sense as does the meaningful part, such as a prefix. For example, in the word "unfortunate," the prefix "un" may be considered separately and recognized. Also, "fortunate" might be identified independently. Putting the two

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together, the student recognizes the entire word "unfortunate." The new teacher needs to try different approaches in assisting a student to identify unknown words. Phonics and syllabication are two approaches to try when analyzing words. It is very important, however, that students are able to read for meaning without analyzing too many unknown words. Phonics and syllabication are tools to use in guiding learners to unlock unknown words in print discourse.

A third approach which may work equally well in whole language approaches in teaching reading emphasizes using context clues only, when a student meets up with an unknown word in print. The context approach in recognizing unknown words stresses the student substituting a word, for the unidentified word, which makes sense with the rest of the words in the sentence, or may make sense when a few more sentences are read.

The new teacher always needs to focus upon meaning theory when teaching reading to students. Thus, holism is involved in guiding students to comprehend that which is being read. Comprehension of content read is the goal of reading instruction. Phonics, syllabication, and the use of context clues are means to an end in unlocking unknown words while reading. To stress comprehension, the student needs to

1. attach meaning to vital facts obtained.
2. comprehend ideas read.
3. use what has been read within new situations.
4. think critically over ideas read.
5. develop unique, novel ideas pertaining to acquired content.
6. attach value or worth to what has been read (See Rajasekar, 2000, Chapter Two).

Each of the above named levels of knowledge or cognition needs adequate emphasis on the appropriate developmental level of each student in the reading curriculum. Certainly, relevant factual information is important to learn and provides the building blocks for more complex levels of thought. Thus, facts acquired need to be understood and applied to problem areas to be solved. What is applied ad used needs to be analyzed with critical thought. Together with analyzation, new and novel ideas may arise since life demands creativity on the part of each person to deal with unique situations which arise. Values are involved in choosing from among a variety of situations in life. Thus, value judgments need to be made. Within

these hierarchical elements of thought, the mentor teacher needs to assist the new teacher on engaging learners to sequentially arise to the top in levels of complex thinking.

Mentor teachers need to be highly knowledgeable about the reading curriculum and possess strategies of instruction to guide students to become the best they can be in the reading arena (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Seven).

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